[illegible] Herskovits & Herskovits E-6 (1929-1932) 1934
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Ah, but they knew each other.

Bayo began paddling faster to keep up with him.

"There is to be a council meeting at Gankwe. I had to hurry away last night, and I must get back there in time. We must have permission from the spirit of the dead man to go back to work, and Sedefo has to find out if he can start up the river, and if he does go, we must all pray to the ancestors because four men will be going from Gankwe, and the *Gran Somàe*—the village elders—have things to decide . . . "

Now, fearing that he might have said too much, he doubled his speed, and Bayo understood that the other preferred to be alone. They belonged to different clans, Bayo to the same as the headman of the tribe, and the Gankwe people to another. Gankwe was sending important men to take the Bakra up the river. The chief's own brother, Asikanu, was to go, although it was said he was being sent out of the way while his adultery case was being settled. There had been talk about this case up and down the river. The Gankwe clan head had given a chief's sanctuary to the offender because he was his own brother, people said. Well, if the injured husband committed suicide as he threatened, and sent a kunu to the family of the brother, and even the village and clan, it would be an ugly thing. But so it was with trouble about women. It was as they said,

"*Sleep is death*
Woman kills man."

He half chanted the proverb and smiled, for he looked forward to his trip up the river with an eye to a visit in Lamé, where the women knew how to love. And he began singing the seketi song which he liked so well. Both the melody and the words were old, but he sang the refrain as if it were quite his own—whatever hardships there were on the river, at Lamé one slept with the women!

At the village of Akunkun an old man and a boy of about nine were at the landing place ready to start. Bayo

Two of its walls were of the plaited palm fronds which were entwined into so pleasant a pattern on the houses of the Bush Negroes. The side walls, however, were carpentered of slats which formed a paling, and over this the slanting roof hung. Through the spaces between the slats we could see the brown feet of the passing villagers, an occasional flare of a gay tunic, or a corner of a man's cloth. Occasionally the big eyes of a child who had wandered over to the paling peered through, to see what was happening inside. Through the slats of the wall nearest to the Granman's house we saw tall earthen jars resting on a plank. There were perhaps four of them, all of varying sizes, and these held creek and river water to which the magic properties of weeds and incantations had been added.

The purposes of these slats were manifold. Not everyone could sit within the council house when the tribal chiefs gathered. Only those whose rank qualified them appeared inside when court was held. But to those sitting quietly outside those palings which formed the side walls of the house, what was spoken inside was clearly audible, and it was thus that many listened for the decisions which they awaited. Then, too, since this was an enclosed council house and when the door was open a plaid cloth hung over the doorway to insure privacy, the only light which penetrated came through these openings in the side walls. The eaves hung low, barring much of the light that might have come through the palings, and this allowed but the grayest flicker even at midday and brought into the council house the atmosphere which symbolized to them the cool of morning. The word "cool" was their image for peace, and health, and fairness, and deliberation, and justice. Inside the council house, then, was a light which "cooled the heart," for heart and head are synonymous to the Bush Negro when he speaks of emotional states.

It was not a large house, and it appeared smaller because of the many furnishings that were in it. Against the wall facing the door a number of magnificently carved benches lay on their sides, one on top of the other, there obviously

Chapter XI

THE COUNCIL OF THE ELDERS

1

GRANMAN Yaukuso's day began before the break of dawn. When the day was at its coolest men's hearts were cool, people said here on the river, and when hearts were cool they could be trusted with weighty matters. But long before men came to stand outside the Granman's house advising with him as he lay in his hammock, the women arrived to report in low monotones the happenings of the previous day, and to take orders for the one to follow.

Lying in our hammocks in the council house, separated from the speakers by the wall of palings and perhaps five feet of clearing, we could hear voices outside from a little after three in the morning, until with the coming day the soft footfalls died down and gave way to the sound of stamping mortars and the cries of children recalling their mothers from early tasks.

What was being said outside we could not hear, but as the days wore on we learned to recognize the voices of the speakers. We learned to know from the rapid, contradicting flow of words which followed upon one of the Granman's orders, that it was his principal wife who spoke, or from the halting, crooning phrases, the voice of his eldest daughter, who had mastered her father's gentlest intonations and now of a morning brought them forth as though she were speaking her lesson. We learned to know as well the range and intensity of the subdued grunts with which

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the Granman punctuated the pauses of the men, though not often their meaning.

But whatever the reports of the women, and the commands given by the Granman, the word for white man interspersed all of the morning's recitals, and the questions of the Granman and the answers often came fast.

Of the men, the Granman asked little. They came up in pairs usually, and now one, now the other took up the report. Clan names were spoken, and occasionally a village name was mentioned, but on the morning preceding the council of the chiefs, only one village was discussed, and one clan. The name of the village was the forbidden one where we had stopped for the night against the Granman's orders, and the clan was that of one group of our paddlers.

2

Early on the morning after our arrival at Asindopo Lantiwe, our paddlers came to see us in the council house. The Granman was busy outside his own house with the chiefs who had gathered for the council meeting, and these men who, like ourselves, were strangers here, came as comrades of an adventurous journey to visit with us and talk over the impressiveness of our reception and the allure of the women of the Granman's village, who were famous everywhere on the river. It was a village where chastity among the girls was closely watched, and where its women were given in marriage to the most influential men on the river.

The men were gotten up splendidly. Their bodies glistened with oil, their cloths were made of the long strips, pieced together by their women, and of patterns which the sun's rays had had no chance to pale. Sedefo's was particularly fine, we thought, but he assured us that it did not compare with the one the river had claimed. His cloth was also made of strips, but the stitching which connected them was a lacy weave, worked in triangles, and made to resemble the vertebrae of a snake. The border was of triangular

Our paddlers rose at once and left the council house. A moment later And'u entered, followed by a group of elders with closely drawn kerchiefs covering their heads. Among these only Kasanya and Bibilo were known to us. Kasanya brought his bench close to ours and moved it yet closer, with a gesture of the head that he wanted to continue the intimacy of our ten days' journey together.

"White man," he said, leaning over and whispering, "call your man from the city. At a krutu a man has someone to speak for him. So we do here."

And so, we soon saw, it was. Address in the council of the Saramacca people was always by indirection. If the Granman wished to speak to one of his chiefs, then he gave his message through another chief, though the man for whom the words were intended might be closer to him or more clearly in view.

Others came in, until the room was half filled when the Granman entered. Today he wore a printed red and black loose coat of knee length, and over it the ceremonial cloth worn by men here in the bush, so that where other men's bare shoulders showed was the sleeve of his coat. On his head were both kerchief and sun helmet. The men were anointed with oil, and many of them wore the jaguar's tooth obia. The last to enter was a man who was well past middle age, and he was followed by the young obiaman from S'ei. Both of these men wore the cloths required of men when not at work, but they were not so uncreased, or so new. Nor were their bodies bright with oil. The older man had several broad stripes of white clay from wrist to shoulder of his right arm, and from knee to pelvis on the inner left thigh. Slung from one shoulder and reaching across to the opposite thigh was a white obia made of native fiber, and on his neck were several others. To these obias were added iron bands on his arms, while below his right knee and at the ankle of his right foot were other obias made of fiber and twisted black thread.

The men we knew greeted us as they took down their benches and found places against the wall farthest from the

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Granman's chair, and the Granman sent the dark flame of his eyes into all the corners of the house to verify the bassia's statement that all were there. The krutu was about to begin.

3

Discussion among the Bush Negroes is the close companion of authority, and both are symbolized in the word *krutu*. Krutu is at once court and parliament, and whether it was that two Bush Negroes wished to discuss the proffered price for a carved paddle, or whether the Granman and his elders met to assess a penalty against a recalcitrant village, the term applied was the same—krutu.

We had had no little experience ourselves with krutu by the time we reached Asindopo Lantiwe. When our paddlers came to us again and again to suggest added fees for the journey upstream, they came to krutu with us. When at Gankwe it had been decided that Sedefo and his three companions might go with us, it was a krutu, and at Pa'aba when the men "went to one side" and decided we were not to be brought to the village where men whose spirits were strong danced Kromanti, it was again krutu. There were, too, the innumerable krutu in the villages on the way when we asked to buy carvings or obias or fish traps.

Now when the question was being decided formally whether we would be permitted to stay here on the upper river, it was again a krutu.

To understand what was implied in the term, how the Bush Negro himself regarded it, what the etiquette surrounding it was, and how it was integrated into the life of these people, it was necessary to range far and wide over this bush civilization. At the core of this word we found two ideas. One was the necessity of direction. "When the boat lacks a steersman, it sleeps quietly," these people say of a village whose chief is dead. Direction, authority was their legacy from Africa. Their ancestors had known the rule of dynasties, and the power of men who reigned.

But there was also the idea of the importance of free discussion, the need to weld authority and the will of those

C25 some action was decided upon by the krutu, the several bassias were entrusted with its execution. Most villages
[562] had at least one woman bassia, and she was responsible to the village head for the behavior of the women. If food was to be gathered for a festival, if the village was to be cleaned for a special occasion like a visit to the village of strangers, it was she who saw that the work was done properly. If there were disputes between two women, it was she who carried the news to the village head, and she who transmitted his censure or decision, if the affair was not of sufficient gravity to warrant the calling together of the old men.

562 "Do the women talk in the big krutu?" we asked Bassia Anaisi, of the Granman's village.

"No, not in krutu. But they talk plenty at home."

• C23 C24 The bassia, we learned, had other duties. He was not only the messenger of his chief, he was also his official spokesman at krutu, and his intermediary in all matters of authority. If a council of the village was to be called, it was he who announced this to the men. When the men had gathered, it was not the chief who spoke, but the bassia who propounded the questions at issue. It was for this reason that Kasanya had leaned over and advised us to call for our town man.

C23 Krutu, we learned, were of two types. Every village had its "*G'a Sembe*"—its council of the older men—who acted as an advisory body to the village captain, and the "*Lanti Krutu*," the meeting of all the men of the village. In this latter general assembly rested the final decisions.

Any important issue involving the village would be handled in two krutu, the g'a sembe krutu, and the lanti krutu. In this big lanti krutu where all the men were represented the bassia would speak the words of the chief and of the old men, and then the people would "go aside." This going aside was the concomitant of every consultation, no matter how informal the group or how unimportant the question which was being considered.

"*We go east*," we would be told when the question arose how far we would travel on any given day, or when we urged a reluctant man to sell a ceremonial bench with which he was loath to part. When the answer came back, it came as a unanimous decision of those most concerned. The members of his family had talked over their need for money and weighed that against his personal love for the object he had carved, and most often the decision was against his disposing of it. He cared for it, that meant it pleased his ak'a, his soul, and of what worth was money when it was a question of displeasing his soul, which might begin to trouble him?

"Bak'a, if we cut off our heads and sell them, then if we buy hats, where will we put them?"

So it was in kruta. The laati, the people, discussed what the bassia had said, as they went apart in small groups. From time to time, a bassia would be called to join one group and then another. What did the chief have in mind when he said this, or that? What did the old men think the consequence would be of the action under discussion? Was it desirable for the village to take a slight, and do nothing at this time? Was it necessary to arrange a compromise, instead of taking the matter into their own hands and beating the members of the offending clan?

After this discussion, each group came back to the assembly united in its stand. If all the groups were agreed, the matter was ended, and the wisdom of the chief and his councilors prevailed. If all disagreed, then it would have been temerity indeed for a chief to attempt to impose his will against the massed dissent. But if there was a lack of agreement, then the long debates would commence. Man after man would summon all his oratory to the argument, and for hours the various factions would speak. In the end, the will of the group would be swayed one way or the other, and a decision reached.

But this was only the procedure in the lowest assembly—that of the village. As men grew older and their sons and

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their nephews took up the dancing for the gods, their interests were directed more and more toward the clan rule.

"I do not dance any more," Seketo had told us, "My sons dance Kromanti now. I must do now what is expected of a man of my years. I must see that our people act wisely in all things which touch this world, and the world of our ancestors."

A clan kruto was a self-sufficient unit made up of members whose maturity fitted them for looking after the worldly and supernatural welfare of their people, for in the larger organization of the tribe it was the clans who stood one with another in perfect equality to complete the whole—the Saramacca people.

The chieftain of the principal village of the clan was the clan head. In him was vested the right to speak for the large grouping, and in the kruto which he conducted the etiquette approached that of the tribal kruto in its intricacy. The village where the clan head lived was inhabited predominantly by his people. In other villages on the river his people might be one of several clan groups. Several villages were inhabited by three or even four clan groups, each of which had its own captain. But such villages were not the seats of clan heads. Where a clan chief ruled would be not only the clan kruto house, but the shrines raised to the important dead of the clan, the clan ancestors whose spiritual powers to help and advise the living were as great as the feats they had accomplished when alive. Here, too, at the village where the clan head lived would be the shrines to the gods who had the clan under their special protection. Above all, here under the direction of the chief were not only those who guided the worldly destinies of the clan, but those who knew how to control the supernatural forces. Here were the obias owned by the clan, those spiritual and unique healing powers whose magic would respond only to the will of clan members who had undergone the training which taught them to operate those forces their ancestors had left for them.

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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assemblies such as were reported from the Awka people on the Marowyne were here not called regularly. There was no central body here to make decisions. The autonomy of village and clan seemed almost unquestioned. There were, to be sure, clan alliances, but these bore more directly on the factions which had formed to control the choice of the next headman. At this krutu, therefore, which had just gathered, there were Captain Sungi, head of the Kasito or Dahomey clan, and And'u, the able chief of the Dombi people, and the headman of the Popoto people, and the headman of the Anago. But Fandya of Baikutu who headed the Nasi people was not there, nor were the Awana people represented, nor the Alabaisa, nor Kwama, nor Bi'ito, nor Fandaki, to cite some examples. Of the missing chiefs, several of them lived a considerable distance from the seat of the Granman, and indeed had been to his village but few times.

"Ai, men must krutu," Kasanya had told us one day on the river. "If a few men decide, then the others have anger in their hearts. That is not good. When the lanti meets, and all men talk, then those who came with anger cool their hearts. Talk is good."

And another time, Sedefo had found occasion to quote the proverb, "If you have not settled one thing, you cannot go on to the second." The best way was to talk things over until all men saw that what was proposed was good or bad.

4

In the krutu house of Asindopo Lantiwe the Granman began to speak.

"Mati—friends—the white man has come. He sits there. With him is his wife. She is there beside him. The man from the white man's city has come. He is there. He will speak for the white man. The white man has a cook. The cook is outside."

"So it is, G'aman," said Captain Sungi.

"Mati, the white man came. All who come to me must eat. The white man must eat."

"True, true, master of the realm."

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623 574 643 "Bassia," said the Granman, as he turned to the young man who had come to announce the krutu to us, "go and tell the lanti the white man has come. Tell the lanti the white man must be fed. All who come to this place must eat. Tell the people they must hunt and fish. Let them bring their kill to us here. Let them bring the fish they catch in their traps. Let all know, and may the gods favor their hunting."

"Ai, clever master," came the response, as the bassia left to issue the orders of the Granman.

623 648 "Bak'a," he said, turning to us, "you come from the city of the white man. The G'aman of the white man, in the white man's city, two moons ago, sent a message to us. It is here." He rose from his chair, and reached for several envelopes which were inserted in the chains of the hanging lamp. "What has been written, we cannot read. You know the writing that white men know. Read what the G'aman of the white man has said."

We opened the letter, with its great official seal. In it was a message from the Governor of the Colony, telling Granman Yankuso of our projected trip to the country of the Saramacca people, asking that we be received by him at his village. All this was read in its translation and transmitted to the Granman by our town man. As he spoke, it was the Granman who punctuated his pauses with the ceremonial affirmations.

"So it is."

"So I hear."

"It is as I know."

All listened attentively to the reading of the letter, and when it was concluded, the Granman turned to the members of the krutu.

"Captain Awagi, when I go to the white man's city, word is sent on ahead so that the people of the city know when the G'aman of the Saramacca people comes. So it is in the bush. When a white man comes to the bush, it is well that from the white man's city they tell me who is coming."

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THE COUNCIL OF THE ELDERS

"Kodo!"

"Another letter has come, Bak'a. Will you read that one, too?"

This was a communication written by a lumber factor down the river. One of the villages, it seemed, was in dispute with another over timber rights. The case was laid before the Granman by the factor, who asked that the controversy be settled promptly, since the dispute was keeping the men of both villages from cutting the lumber which had been promised him.

Yankuso now spoke again: "You have heard the message, friends. The man who buys timber asks that I settle this dispute between two of our clans. Their villages are far from here. The clans of the Saramacca people can settle their own disputes."

"Gbolo!"

"So I say, friends. I can look at the cows, but from a distance I cannot tell how many there are. It is not for us here to decide this."

"*Kwɛti, kwɛti!*—No, no!"

"It is true, friends, as the Saramacca people say, 'The G'aman's breasts are for all his children.' But it is not my children who have come to me. Bak'a," he said, suddenly turning to us, "later you will write for me to this man who buys lumber. Tell him that for the sake of sweet soup a man eats sour dumplings. So I say."

The Granman looked about him. The heat of midday filled the darkness of the council house, and old Bibifo had dozed off. The gaze of the chief fixed him.

"Mati!" he said, when Bibifo stirred. "Sleep is death!"

Slowly the Granman's eyes circled the room until they came to us.

"The Bak'a has come," he repeated, with his slow intonation, every syllable clearly enunciated. "When the Bak'a came, the rain fell. From Asindopo Lantiwe we shot guns of welcome, from Abendá Konde guns were shot. In the heavens, the gods spoke them welcome. There was thunder."

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643 821 716 623 "True, true, G'aman."

"Captain And'u, the gods sent the rain to cool everything when the Bak'a came. The gods of the river carried the Bak'a without mishap. We have heard of what the Bak'a has done. He has been at your country, at S'ei. He says he comes to learn. He says he does not come to buy wood or to work gold. What he says is good. Yet a full creek does not clear the bank of weeds. Tell us what the Bak'a did in your country, Captain And'u."

609 123 623 "The Bak'a came to S'ei. All that was there he looked at. He walked about the village. His woman talked to our women. The Bak'a spoke with our men. He asked about the obias in the krutu house. His woman asked our women about their gods. What was the name of the wife of the Gran Gadu, he wanted to know."

With every sentence, came the affirmation of the chief.

"So I know."

"So it is."

"By Ando!"

"So I heard."

And'u continued. "The Bak'a knows the land of the Negroes—*a sabi Afrika*. With him he has a great book. In it he has pictures."

"True, true."

"There are pictures of obias."

"Ya-hai!"

"There are pictures of the Kromanti houses."

"So it is!"

"There are pictures of people who have the gods."

"*Kweti-kweti*—No, no!"

"Yet pictures in S'ei the Bak'a did not make. The Bak'a said, 'If your ancestors tell you not to talk, do not talk. But when you talk, do not lie!' That which we did not wish to be done he would not do, his woman would not do."

"Gbolo!" exclaimed the Granman, "this is as I have heard. Now the Bak'a has come up the river. His woman has light hair, she is as our Toné people. The river has treated the Bak'a well. The gods of the river have let the Bak'a pass. 716

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Bak'a pass. Friends, the river is more than I am. . . . Let us hear what the Bak'a has done on the river. Friend Kasanya, you have traveled with the Bak'a. Speak of what he has done."

"It is as Captain And'u has said," Kasanya began, "what was forbidden, the Bak'a did not do."

The Granman interposed an objection.

"I sent a message to the Bak'a by the husband of my daughter. To him I said, speak to the Bak'a, say that at all villages on the Saramacca you will be received. But two villages have not walked well with the G'aman. At those you will not stop. Yet at one of them the Bak'a stopped."

"So it is, cunning master. This was how it happened. Darkness was falling. Everywhere was the big bush. A storm was on its way."

"So I know."

"There were no other villages near. The next one could only be reached after dark. There were bad rapids ahead."

"So I understand."

"The Bak'a woman was in the boat. To make camp before the storm came was not possible. We had a krutu. We spoke with the Bak'a. The Bak'a said we must go where we could find a roof."

The Granman grunted, was silent for a moment, then took up the story.

"Friends, night overtook the white man in the bush. He had a woman with him. The men said they could not make camp at night. The white man took his woman to where there was shelter. Into the village he did not go. At the first house he slept. Early in the morning he left. He does not know the river. The men brought him at dark to the forbidden village. The gods sent a great wind when the Bak'a crossed the river to show their displeasure, but the Bak'a and his woman they did not harm. The gods took it into their hands. The gods are more than I am."

"So it is, G'aman."

"Friends, the children of the bush know what is done in the bush. Yet a man's lips must speak for himself. Let

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the Bak'a himself tell why he has come the long way to the Saramacca river and what it is he seeks."

There was a general chorus of agreement, and silence awaited our accounting.

As the town man began to repeat our words to the Granman, the quiet of the house was heightened by an occasional stirring outside the paling. From where we sat, we could see brown motionless feet, which told us that there were many more than those inside, who were listening to the white man's reason for being in the bush.

Again the Granman made the traditional responses.

"So it is, white man."

"True, what you have said, bassia."

Finally our telling was at an end. Again there was a silence as we sat, tensely waiting.

The Granman again broke the silence.

"Friends, chiefs, you have heard. The white man is here. He comes to learn of our life. The gods of the river have brought him and his woman safely. The Great God sent the rain to cool the air when he reached Asindopo Lantiwe. The gods are more than I am. The river is more than I am. But the Saramacca people are also more than I am. It is you, headmen of the Saramacca people, who must speak."

"Ai, G'aman," said the man who had the stripes of white on him and who wore the many obias. "But have the ancestors spoken?"

"Truly you ask, friend," was the response. "It is well that you think of these things. In the bush, we think before we speak. Do you go aside and consider well."

Slowly the members of the krutu arose from their benches. Softly, with bent form, each passed out of the doorway. We were alone with the Granman, who waited with us for the reply of the chiefs.

5

As the elders slowly filed out of the council house, it was as though a jury were leaving the courtroom to decide a case which had been laid before it. And as we learned more,

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we found that for the krutu to act as a jury was an important part of its work. The krutu not only saw to the making of law, but it was also the medium for levying penalties upon those who transgressed law. The same krutu that legislated could judge infractions of its legislation. In its hands was the power to enforce the decisions it had made against the offender.

We had wondered whether, in this Suriname bush, the African court which so characterized the civilization of the ancestors of these people had survived. When we heard of the supernatural vengeance which followed upon infractions of custom, we sought to find out if people took the matter of punishment into their own hands, if kunu was reinforced by human assistance.

"Ai, mati," a chief once said to us, "kunu is strong, but the krutu is strong, too."

If a man had sworn an oath against another, had called down upon another a curse of some evil spirit, or asked that the gods make a man impotent, or that they stop the womb of his wife from conceiving, or if a man murdered by means other than witchcraft, then he was judged by a krutu. A man who had destroyed a canoe belonging to another—a serious offense, for, as the Bush Negro says, "Had our forefathers not had the wisdom to build canoes, we would still be slaves to the Bak'a"—he, too, would come before this court. The adulterer would be brought here for the assessment of his fine.

When the krutu sat as a court, the accused was not without the right of defense. If it were thieving, or adultery, or the telling of falsehoods, or trespass, or the destruction of the property of another, where the kunu involved was not of the greatest, then the case was judged on the basis of the evidence. In the court, the interests of the one who was accused were cared for by one of the elders of his *mbe*, his relative and a fellow member of his own great family. But when the crime was one of the greater ones, then methods other than the sole use of testimony were employed. Evidence was necessary, but evidence was not

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623 695 enough if the accused persisted in denying such crimes. In that case he called upon the gods to witness that the sin of which he was accused had not been committed by him, and this called for trial by ordeal.

695 The ordeal as a judicial measure was not unknown to our own civilization. In Africa it flourished in the native courts before the coming of the white man, and, it is whispered, still persists in the Suriname bush. The facts as we tell them, we cannot vouch for from our own experience. They were given us independently by two men who have spent many years among the Saramacca people, men who speak the language fluently and who for long periods have lived in this big bush of the Saramacca tribe. Other facts which they told us we had been able to corroborate. These whispers, however, we could not check, for few Bush Negroes would admit that they knew anything of the ordeal.

One way of trial by ordeal was to "*bebe so'i*," to drink the oath. It was utilized in accusations of witchcraft and sorcery. The priests and the elders prepared a drink of deadly poison. Over it magic incantations were pronounced by the obia men. The oath of innocence was taken, and the accused drank. If the potion was retained and the man died, his guilt had been proved, but if the drink was vomited, he was innocent. What his redress was if he were proved not guilty, we were not able to discover.

"If a man is guilty of *wisi*—of evil magic," our friend said, when he told us the story, "he would be afraid of the oath. When it came time to drink, no matter how brave he was, he would confess."

695 684 Then there was the proof offered in adultery cases, described to us by the other man who knew the ways of the Saramacca folk. When both man and woman who had been accused of misconduct denied their guilt, the procedure this man had witnessed was this. The woman was made to kneel before the assembled krutu of the village. While she knelt there, a buzzard's feather was put into water, in a calabash of the kind they call gubi, and the water was

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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treated with obia. An obia man now addressed the woman who denied the charge that had been lodged against her, restating the accusation and her denial. Then he asked her once more if she were guilty, and when the answer was still "No," the test was applied.

Through the woman's tongue the quill of the feather, which had been treated with magic, was thrust. When the entire length of the feather had passed through the tongue, then it was that the proof was had. If the woman's tongue neither swelled nor showed blood, she was innocent.

But whether it be trial by ordeal or through the taking of testimony, punishment by the krutu went along with punishment by the spirits. Only incest, we learned, was not punishable by the court. That was for kunu alone to avenge.

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Once more the krutu was in session. Where the men had "gone aside," we did not know, but while we sat in the krutu house, alone with Moana Yankuso, we heard nothing.

The Granman had spoken little. Were our hammocks tied well the night before? Were we satisfied with the arrangements he had made for the storing of our supplies?

What were the elders deciding? We could not but wonder with anxiety. Would this krutu, after the fashion of the bush, where time meant so little, come to no decision? Was the answer to be one that had been previously arranged?

Chief Sungi was the first to speak.

"G'aman, we have gone aside. Your captains and bassias have spoken together. We say, the white man has come. The white man must eat. Let all be told to bring gifts, that you may feed those who have come to you."

"So it is," was the Granman's response. "Friends, great thanks to you. What you have said is good. Let all return to their villages. Let all tell their people that the white man has come. Let all come with gifts, that we may eat."

There was a chorus of affirmations. The Granman arose.

1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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"White man," he said, "I have told the young men to hunt, I have told them to fish. My captains, who are here, are going to their villages. You have heard. Their women will come with rice. The young men will bring their kill. So it is in the bush. So G'aman Yankuso holds those who come to him."

As the elders, each with his word of leave taking, left the house to us, we thought of the Granman's last words and of the verdict of the krutu. We had sat long enough in this assembly to realize the circumlocution which went with all statement, and we tried to decipher the cryptic words of the chiefs. Was it a verdict at all? Or was it merely a way of refusing to come to any decision when the white man sat in the krutu which was deciding the fate of his visit? That the decision would be reflected in the attitude of the people of the village seemed reasonable to suppose. And so, drawing aside the curtain which hung over the door, we went out into the open square before our house to see what the krutu had decided.

1/Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR3 Bush Negroes SR3
Saramacca

Chapter XV

THE ARTIST OF MA'LOBBI

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WE WERE recalled to the council house for a final informal krutu with Granman Yankuso and some of his elders before the more formal leave-taking on the river bank. Our boats were being loaded and soon we should be on our way down river. With the elders were the diviners, and our friend, the bassia.

The Granman opened the krutu, greeting and addressing the men who were present, until he turned to us.

"White man, you and your woman came to my village. I held you both well. Now when you are ready to go I give you my grandson for paddler, and the chief of my village for captain of your boat. That is how we do with those who come in friendship."

Through our town man, as was the way of the krutu, we spoke our acknowledgments to him, and our regrets that our visit was ending. Through our man, the last gifts to the tribal head were tendered, and through one of the elders, the ritual expression of thanks was returned us for what we had put before the Granman.

We had two favors to ask of him. For many days we had lived in this house, and had admired the fine carvings which the council house held. In our own country, when we thought of the days on the upper Saramacca River, a piece of carving from this house would give us much pleasure. But of the elaborate carvings we did not wish to

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

deprive him. Might we buy, however, one of the simple benches from the shelf above the door, which the chiefs and we ourselves had used many times?

The one we took down had interested us for its possible ritual significance. On its top a single design was repeated four times. It was a representation of an axe-head, and the clan of Yankuso was the Matchau, the Axe Clan.

The Granman looked at the diviner. "*Fa fo do?*—What to do?" was his query.

The man he addressed murmured, "*T'obi*—Trouble."

But it was, after all, only a small and slightly ornamented bench.

"Take it!" the Granman said. "What else is it you ask?"

There was the apinti drum. In the house where objects of all peoples of the earth were brought for men and women to look at, there were none of the fine carvings the Bush Negroes make. When we returned, we would place beside the African and Indian objects which were there those of the Saramacca people. As yet, we had not been able to buy an apinti drum. This one was more beautiful than any we had seen. Could he not sell it to us, so that everyone might know that the finest of drums had come from the council house of Moana Yankuso, Granman of the Saramacca people?

This time he did not hesitate. He smiled, and shook his head.

"No, no, white man," he said, "this drum is not for me to sell. This one I cannot part with, not for all your goods. Down river, when you visit my villages, you can get an apinti which will be beautiful. When you come to the village of Akunkun, and you see Kasanya, ask him to find you an apinti. I will tell Captain Mataibo to leave a message at other villages that you want an apinti. This one no gold can buy."

This was not our first attempt to buy an apinti drum. Nor was it to be the last refusal.

Waiting, we sat in the council house while our supplies were being carried to the canoes and placed in them, until

1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-6 (1928-1929) 1934
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123 Mataibo, the head of Yankuso's village, who was entrusted
● 623 with the safe passage of our boats, came to announce that
574 the men had done loading. Before the morning was yet
609 well advanced we left the house, and with the Granman
[554] under his umbrella, which was the highest of insignia,
passed to the river bank.

Our friends were there—the bassia, and Dida, and Amasina, and the Granman's wives and his little grandson, who shouted to us, "*Waka bon, ye'e!*—Travel well, you hear!" in the best manner of his elders. Again three guns sounded, and once more we were on the river, looking up at the people of these villages of the Pikien Rio who were waving to us from the shore.

502 Going down the river was restful. The enjoyment of the easy motion of the boats was felt in the manner of the paddlers themselves. Now there was no hard poling against the heavy current. As canoes were urged on the two paddlers wielded their long blades in unison, and the dugouts swung downstream in the center of the river, where the current was heaviest. When the murmurs of the rapids ahead were heard, it was but a moment until they grew into a roar, and then, in another, we were through, the man at the front standing up for an instant so that, with a twist of his paddle, he might turn the head of the boat from any threatening rock, while the stern man did not stroke at all, but merely held the craft on the course which was marked where the water tossed itself into foam-capped waves. Sometimes, as we came to rapids where the force of the water was especially strong, or there was a sharp double curve to be negotiated, the two boats would pause for a moment while Mataibo called out to the younger men the course to follow. Then into the falls, and through them, and our bow paddler would carefully rearrange his loin cloth and sit down once more to take up his steady stroking.

123 Opposite one village Sungi came in his boat to meet us,
609 to give and receive a final gift, and say his goodbye. But
[831] it was not to the landing place of Dahomey that he took us for this interchange, but to the village of his wife, he told

1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
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she doesn't make children, then he can send her back. But most often it is the woman who goes away."

When the wife left the home her husband had built for her and went to her family, he had to go to her village and plead for her return, while her relations berated him soundly for his behavior toward their kin. If he had not mistreated her badly, the family would urge her to return to him, and so great would that pressure be that she would have to go. But Bayo again repeated that this did not happen often. If a woman left her husband and he failed to come for her, they were divorced. She could not remarry until three months had passed.

But Bayo was more interested in marriage than in divorce, and the talk again turned to his betrothal.

His mother and her brothers had decided upon the match. His uncles had gone to the family of the girl, and talked with her mother's brothers. Her people called a family krutu to decide whether Bayo was qualified to be a suitable husband for this young member of their family.

"Were you there?"

"No. It was a krutu of her family. But I know how they talk at these krutu, for when my sister was promised in marriage my own family had a krutu, and I sat and listened. Anybody who knew anything bad about my brother-in-law or his family told of it. They talk much at these krutu. The woman you met at Djamungo talked when the men talked, and she talked when the women talked," he finished with a laugh, as though it were a relief to him to know that at least she had had no say when his girl's family had gathered to look into his own family position, and his personal habits of work, and the gifts the gods had given him.

At this krutu of the girl's family, Bayo had, however, been thoroughly discussed. Was he a good worker? Could he hunt well? How did he behave in strange villages? At his initiation had the gods come strong to him? Had he done anything that his wife's family would later be ashamed of?

The white man wondered about the kunu which hung over Bayo's family, the kunu of incest, the deadliest of all

2: Kahn D-5 (1922-1930) 1931
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramaccaner

a prisoner, and refusing to take the special train awaiting him at Kabel. Special trains, he said, were not for prisoners. He was paddled the additional ninety miles in his own corial, which took six days longer. Very vexed at this, the Governor did not shake hands with him, and Jankoeso was offended. "Why doesn't he tell me 'Howdy'?" he asked Mynheer Wolff, who is always instrumental in furthering friendly relations between Dutch and Djukas. Wolff called the Governor outside, and advised him to treat the Granman with more cordiality. The necessary handshaking was done, and the parley continued more affably. The guilty one was apprehended and jailed for a year. Once again there went upstream the annual present of the Dutch government to each Granman. This is a continuation of the custom of tribute money paid to the Bush Negroes ever since the days of the black rebellions. Every year each Granman receives 1500 guilders.

The Granman is the actual chief of the river nation, but the government centres in the village proper. The village is governed by a headman or *captain*, and aiding him in his work is a council or *bosseia*, consisting of three or four or more of the most mature men and women of the town. "Bosseia," like the American colloquial *boss*, comes from the Dutch word *baas*. Here the rough justice of the jungle is administered, and local disputes are settled. Here decisions are made concerning the ownership of timber, and property rights in cassava fields. Quarrels over women are more frequent than any other kind of disputes, and they, too, are settled by the village captain and his bosseia.

2: Kahn D-5 (1922-1930) 1931
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramaccaner

622 623 352 The bosseia meet under a separate shed, specially built for this purpose. The captain has a "throne," which is an ornately carved stool. The one belonging to the captain of the village of Lombe was purchased and brought back to the American Museum of Natural History. The members of the bosseia, too, have ceremonial seats, with elaborately pierced carving, typically West African in design. When the occasion arises, a meeting is held and the council is seated about on these ceremonial benches to hold palaver.

622 623 692 [531] The business is brought up. Perhaps it is a domestic quarrel—two men over one woman. The offended party rises and begins exercising the Bush Negro's traditional privilege of unlimited and vociferous oratory. He details his wrongs. Grand gestures accompany the sonorous flow of words. The interested members of the village sit at a respectful distance from the captain and bosseia, and listen to the harangue. When other speakers have had their say, any inhabitant of the village may get up and give his or her opinion. Proudly the captain exercises his judicial talent, and the decision is handed down. It is not questioned.

622 623 562 [364] The women members of the bosseia have as much power as the men. It is chiefly the women who see that the ancestral and village customs are enforced. They are the guardians of the ancient traditions and customs of the race. To them, also, belongs the duty of keeping the village clean. If the town needs a general cleaning, the women bosseia go about from hut to hut, telling the women to get together and perform the task.

2: Kahn D-5 (1922-1930) 1931
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
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When there is a conflict between villages over their hunting and fishing territories, the captains and bosseias of each town meet on some neutral ground and arbitrate the matter. Then, indeed, the parley becomes wordy and rhetorical. Each cause is championed with long speeches, setting forth oratorically the rights and conditions involved. But once an agreement is arrived at, the matter is closed.

Local disputes, excluding those over women, are not nearly so common or so serious as they are among civilized white men. There is a minimum of quarrelling among the Djukas; they get along together in an almost idyllic way. Wherever there are women, there will, of course, be quarrelling, for, in the words of Confucius, "Disorder does not come from heaven, but is brought about by women." Outside of this factor there is little friction in the Bush Negro community. Their highly communalized government works exceedingly well.

The Granman and his captains have an annual council to make laws for the coming year. This and other assemblies are known as *kruta*. The captains and bosseias from surrounding villages concentrate at some important town to meet the Granman there. The Council near Gansee, the trading-post, included the villages of Nu, Lombe, Biodoti, Ganya Condree, and Adawai. Jankoeso refused to hold his parley in the town proper, although Gansee is the largest village in the entire tribe, because there is a Christian mission station there, conducted by the Moravian Brothers. Jankoeso is in favour of retaining the ancestral gods of the jungle, and does not look with favour upon the white proselytizers.

[For additional information on the judicial functions of the lãnti kuutu (the assembly of men), see also categories 692 and 693.]

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765 are divided up equally among all the inhabitants of the village. But if the dead person had near relatives in the village, children, nephews, or brothers, it is they who stand the main burden. [613] Members of the dead person's lineage who are settled in other villages contribute equally to the expenses and the organizing of the festival, but in a symbolic fashion. /181/

[123] A council (kuutu) of the village inhabitants sets the date; during the two weeks preceding each one is busy. The women 765 hull and winnow rice, prepare great quantities of couac and 262 sugar-cane juice. The busimã scour the bush and have meat and fish smoked. Each one, according to his means, buys tafia, sugar, chocolate, and other articles of food liked by the Refugee Blacks.

765 The celebration of the rites occupies a whole week. This 795 is because, the Refugee Blacks think the influence of the dead person can be eliminated only progressively by the repetition of the rite of separation.

The first day, the yɔrka of the dead person whose mourning is going to be lifted is called by formulas beaten on the [535] apinti drum. Then possession dances take place.

765 The second day is reserved for the material preparation for the ceremonies to follow.

[613] The third day, the spouse in mourning, if there is one, is conducted by the members of the dead person's lineage under [822] the mortuary shed. He is dressed in red and is congratulated [983] for having kept the mourning well. Then he is led to the river, [795] and old women of the dead person's lineage begin to bathe him while adjuring the yɔrka to part company with him.

The fourth day at nightfall, all those present assemble [538] at the mortuary shed. They recite tales (Anãsi tɔli), [781] improvisations (mato), and riddles (ɔdo). This phase of the festival has as its object the concentrating of the attention of the hearers; it creates a warm, collective atmosphere which impregnates those present, bringing to them intense and highly colored emotions.